

Depression, Anxiety Show up at Medical Exercise

(PASO BLANCO, PANAMA, April 16, 2006) – While many around the world were celebrating the joys of Easter Sunday, two U.S. Air Force physicians were among a team of more than a dozen treating patients as part of a 10-day medical readiness training exercise and noticing a surprising number of patients with clinical depression and anxiety.



Approximately 800 patients received care at the MEDRETE in the first three days of being in Paso Blanco, Panama. Family practice physicians treated a variety of ailments, but one of the ones that surprised them most was complaints of clinical depression and anxiety.

Base in Colorado Springs, Colo., treated almost 350 patients in three days of care at Paso Blanco, estimating that perhaps even 20 percent of their adult patients had complaints of depression or clinical anxiety. Unfortunately, the MEDRETE pharmacy didn't include antidepressants, so the best the doctors could do was recommend counseling at a Panamanian clinic.

The two doctors are part of the bilateral team of health care providers from the United States Air Force and Panamanian government that is providing free health care in remote areas of Panama while giving health care providers experience at addressing health care issues in limiting settings.

"I see a lot of this in my practice at home, but I didn't expect to see it here at all," said Dr. Brent Smith, a family physician from Malmstrom Air Force Base in Great Falls, Mont. "In the past, I figured that many of my patients had been influenced by what they had read in magazines or seen on TV, but the media in Panama is certainly not talking about depression medications and anxiety. It certainly lends credence to the idea that these ailments have a chemical origin."

Smith, along with colleague Dr. Ron Peveto of Peterson Air Force